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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1512

INFO RUEHDL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 5076

RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 0466

RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 0303

RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1059

RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 0572

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0175

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 003095

SIPDIS

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EUR FOR A/S FRIED AND PDAS VOLKER

WHA FOR A/S SHANNON AND PDAS SHAPIRO

EUR/WE FOR ALLEGRONE, CLEMENTS, AND CERVELLI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/26/2016

TAGS: PREL CU SP

SUBJECT: SPAIN/CUBA: SPANISH DOCTOR CONSULTS ON CASTRO
ILLNESS

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶11. (U) Spanish media reported that Doctor Jose Luis Garcia Sabrido, Chief Surgeon of the Community of Madrid's Gregorio Maranon Hospital, had examined Fidel Castro for 90 minutes on December 21. Garcia Sabrido asserted on December 26 that "as far as I know, Castro does not have cancer." Garcia Sabrido also said Castro was recovering well "for someone of his advanced age," and could conceivably recover sufficiently to return to power. In a news conference, Garcia Sabrido stated that "(Castro) does not have a malignant tumor," and is recovering from very serious and complex surgery and that the post-operative process includes "muscular and nutritional rehabilitation." Garcia Sabrido declined to elaborate on the nature of Castro's condition. He said that Castro's intellectual ability remained intact, but failed to discuss his current physical condition, other than to say that it was "stable." Garcia Sabrido, who admitted treating other unnamed Cuban leadership figures, lauded Castro's medical care in Havana and said he had not recommended any changes in his rehabilitation regimen. Asked for his personal views on the Cuban system, Garcia Sabrido said that he "admired the successes of Cuban society, but do not want to offer my opinion on other political issues."

¶12. (C) Following up on these reports, Post consulted various sources for additional details. One contact, XXXXXXXXXXXX, a Cuba activist and close associate of noted exile author Carlos Alberto Montaner, said that he was certain that Doctor Garcia Sabrido was being truthful and that if he said that Castro did not have cancer, then Castro did not have cancer. XXXXXXXXXXXX said that Garcia Sabrido freely acknowledged his sympathy for Fidel Castro and was a frequent visitor to the island, but that in the Madrid medical community he was also known as a skilled surgeon with a high degree of integrity. XXXXXXXXXXXX found it impossible to contemplate that Garcia Sabrido would have risked his professional reputation merely to delay public knowledge of the details of Castro's illness. XXXXXXXXXXXX said that in having Garcia Sabrido make a positive assertion that Castro does not have cancer, the Cuban Government has obtained a credible foreign specialist to confirm what they have been claiming in recent weeks.

//BUT CUBAN EMBASSY DID REQUEST CANCER DRUGS//

¶13. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX said that while he felt compelled to accept

Garcia Sabrido's statements, he was still confused by elements of this case. Most importantly, XXXXXXXXXXXX had confirmed from sources in the Madrid Community health system that the Cuban Embassy in Madrid had requested specialized cancer drugs (sitostatic drugs to inhibit cancer cell growth) and pain killers in June 2006. XXXXXXXXXXXX speculated that the drugs may have been for another Cuban leader.

//COMMENT//

¶4. (C) The fact that Doctor Garcia Sabrido is technically an employee of the Popular Party-governed Community of Madrid generated some mild discomfort for Madrid PP leader Esperanza Aguirre, who made clear that Garcia Sabrido had undertaken his trip to Cuba in his own capacity and without Community funds. All political figures generally defended the humanitarian nature of Garcia Sabrido's actions, though some Cuban activists in Madrid suggested that Spanish donors should also insist on being able to provide medicines to Caritas and other charitable organizations in Cuba. Our sense is that most Spaniards will find Garcia's Sabrido's actions appropriate. In a conversation with DCM, MFA Director General for Foreign Policy Rafael Dezcallar said that he had no new information as a result of the Garcia Sabrido's trip to Cuba, but said he believed Spanish officials could debrief Garcia Sabrido soon and offered to meet with DCM at a later date to discuss the issue further. We will continue to investigate and report any new information as it develops.

AGUIRRE